Netwatch

By Jim Carroll

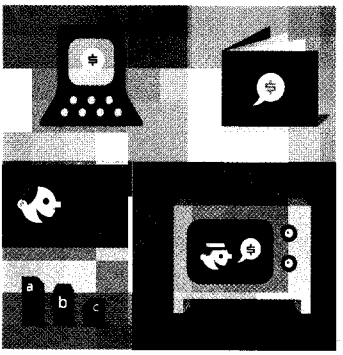
Your guide to business & accounting on the Internet

New kid on the blog

The latest rage sweeping the Internet goes by the strange and cumbersome name of "blogs." Despite the odd appellation, it is a trend that will affect the way you learn, market your goods and services, and even how you provide customer or client support.

Blogs, also known as "weblogs," are best described as a sort of online diary. There are tens of thousands of blogs, each containing a steady stream of information about an individual or a topic, many of them presenting information of questionable or useless value. Indeed, spend some time in "blogdom" and you can be easily convinced there are a lot of crackpots out there.

But if you dismiss the blogging phenomena entirely on that basis, you will be missing out on what is likely one of the most significant corporate technologies in the years to come.



Here are three reasons why you should pay attention to weblogs.

First, even though there are lots of worthless blogs, many are full of useful information and intelligence. I regularly scan a variety of weblogs that are related to my areas of interest — including technology, knowledge management, ethics, change management and innovation.

Second, there is a furious pace of technology development in the world of blogdom that is leading to very powerful information utilities. Key among the emerging standards is RSS (RDF Site Summary). Without getting too technical, RSS lets me use a fabulous tool such as NewzCrawler to instantly scan through the headlines of not only dozens of blogs, but also of news sources such as the BBC and *Christian Science Monitor*. I expect the combination of blogging technology and RSS will provide the backbone by which many organizations establish corporate knowledge networks in the future.

Third, and most fascinating, is that the weblog trend promises to further democratize the Internet — at least in terms of providing everyone with the ability to easily publish information online. Today, it's obvious that few have actually taken the time to learn how to create a website and keep it up to date. Blogging technology changes that. Anyone who can use a browser now has the capability to post information to a blog, and hence to the Web — a significant change in the online publishing paradigm and one that promises to revolutionize the way corporations make strategic use of the Internet.

For example, blogging technology permits a partner in an accounting firm to establish his or her private Web page, with a regular stream of information for clients. A manufacturing company can establish multiple weblogs within its site, using them to provide direct support, technical updates, product bulletins and other information to customers. A PR agency can establish a weblog that contains a constant flow of news releases. And all this can be done without the technical fuss and complications involved in creating and maintaining websites.

I suggest you immerse yourself in the world of blogs — you can easily create your own at services such as Blog*Spot or Blogger and discover the countless number of existing blogs within these sites. And if you have some technical expertise and really want to get into it, download and install a program such as Movable Type that will let you create any number of weblogs.

Jim Carroll, FCA, maintains his own frequently updated weblog at www.jimcarroll.info

WORLD OF WEBLOGS

NewzCrawler www.newzcrawler.com

Blog*Spot http://www.blogspot.com

Blogger www.blogger.com

Movable Type www.movabletype.org